

VENTURA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

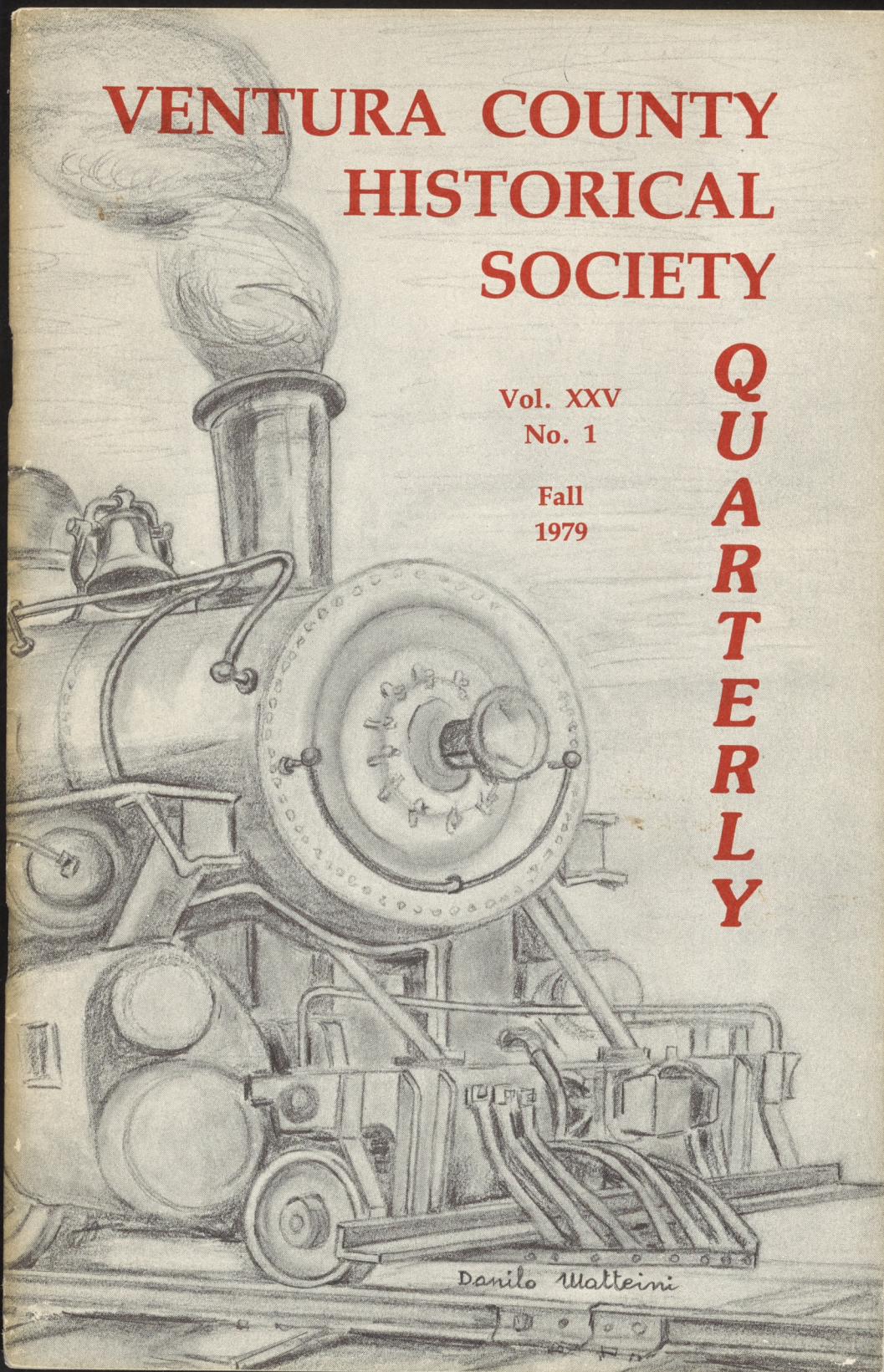
Vol. XXV

No. 1

Fall

1979

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Danilo Matteini

Ventura County Historical Society

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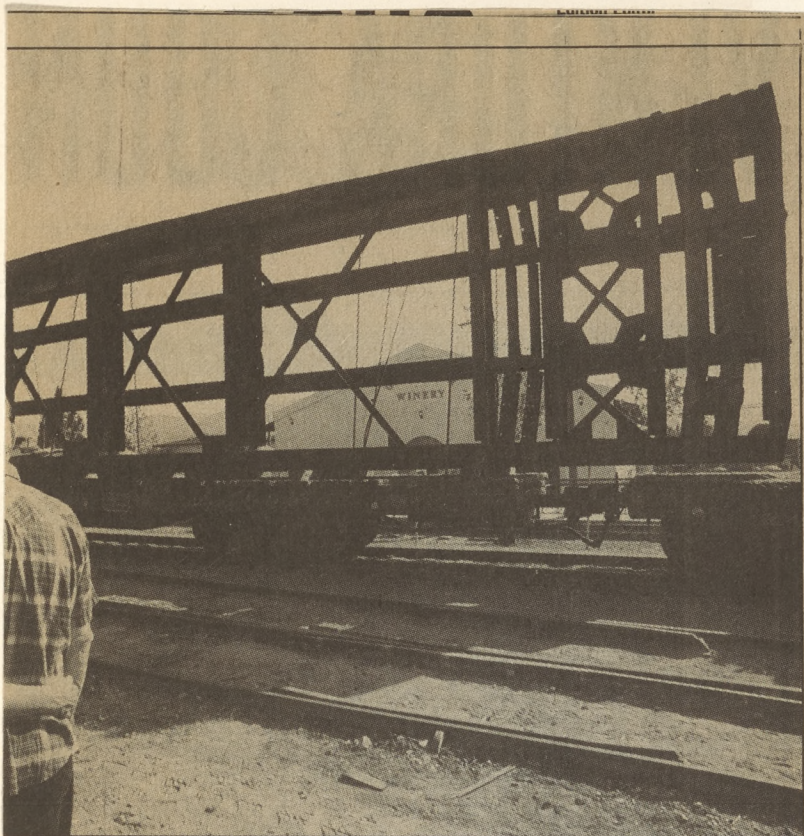
The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Ventura County Historical Museum, 100 E. Main, Ventura, California. Annual memberships for husband and wife are active (\$15) and sustaining (\$25); for business (\$100) and student (\$5); and life (\$500).

The *Quarterly* is published from the Society's headquarters. The Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions by authors of the articles. Grant W. Heil is Editor and the Staff includes Robert O. Browne, Miriam Dudley, Roy Eisele, Lee Harris, Charles H. Heil, David W. Hill, Danilo Matteini, Johanna D. Overby, Austin B. Perley, Ynez Rodriguez, Tom Roe, Richard D. Willett and Helen Wright.

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MEL MELCON / Los Angeles Times

gaze at the turntable bridge, 96 by 18½ feet and weighing 70 tons.

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Saturday's festival-like delivery capped what has been a long and often frustrating project for the society and city.

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yards. Once found, it proceeded on its journey, but because its enormous size and high center of gravity threatened to throw the train off the tracks at every bend, the journey proceeded at a mule's pace.

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"It's amazing that we've even gotten this far," said society member Rick Swanson. "This is a pretty ambitious project for a group that's only been around a few years."

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Turntable Has Fillmore Rail Fans in a Spin

Robert
Mrs.
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■ **Trains:** In festive atmosphere, circa-1909 equipment that turns engines around is welcomed to town. Hope is that it will add fire to tourism.

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David
John I
Mr. a
Robert
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Mrs. I

By COLL METCALFE
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

FILLMORE—In many cities, you might be hard pressed to find scores of people anxious to watch a 70-ton piece of brown rusted metal roll into town. But Fillmore isn't your average community.

On Saturday, more than 100 people flocked to the center of town to watch the delivery of the Santa Clara River Valley Railroad Historical Society's monstrous rail-car turntable.

"We've just been playing up till now," Dave Wilkinson, owner of the Fillmore & Western Railroad, said as he shaded his eyes to look up at the 88-year-old span of steel. "The real work's just begun."

Purchased from the Canadian town of Capreol for \$16,000, the turntable is a massive jumble of heavy iron supports held together by thick round rivets. It was, and will be, used to manipulate and link train cars and engines.

Heavy cranes will begin unloading the 96-foot-long bridge-like apparatus as well as giant electric motors and circular track Monday. The society hopes to have it up and running by next fall as the centerpiece of its Railroad Interpretive Center next to City Hall.



Roberta Roush and Jerry Morford

eled parts of the town, city leaders saw a chance to restore its luster.

Now, banking its future on the past, this little town of corner groceries and serene neighborhoods is again feeling the rumble of hundred-ton engines as the community's interpretive center begins to take shape.

It is hoped that the current train rides through the orchards between Fillmore and Santa Paula, coupled with a museum of massive railroading memorabilia, will coax Southern California residents to the little town for a slice of American history.

"This is going to mean a lot to Fillmore," society President Paul Haase said of the turntable and interpretive center. "With any luck, it'll get more people to love

The Ventura County Historical Society *Quarterly*

Grant W. Heil, Editor

Vol. XXV, No. 1

Fall 1979

Contents

TERRIBLE DISASTER, MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

Ventura Free Press; June 5, 1903

THE LAST DAYS OF STEAM

By Robert R. McNeel

I. Recollections of the Santa Paula Branch

II. Memories of the Ojai Branch

Notice

Bob McNeel also provided the locomotive pictures from his collection; the other photographs were supplied by the Ventura County Historical Museum, Harold Serene and the Scott Newhalls. Dr. Joe Maguire was the source of the footnotes, and Danilo Matteini made the cover sketch from an engine and car in the railroad museum.

Turntable Has Fillmore Rail Fans in a Spin

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The turntable is right at home here, because Fillmore is a railroad town at heart. It grew up with the holler of train whistles and the clanking of box cars. But with the completion of the nation's web of superhighways in the middle of the century, the nation's fascination with railroading began to fade, as did the towns that had prospered along the tracks.

Fillmore was no different.

In the early 1900s, the town was a hub of commerce as trains loaded up on the county's harvest of ripe citrus and vegetables. But by the 1950s, the number of trains pulling into this dusty hamlet began to drop until the railroads pulled up their stakes altogether to move closer to the coast and harbors like the one at Port Hueneme.

"This was a railroad town," Cecilia Uber of the Fillmore Chamber of Commerce said recently. "That was its heart and soul."

The community languished with the county's lowest income rates for several years. But when the 1994 Northridge earthquake lev-



MEL MELCON / Los Angeles Times

Roberta Roush and Jerry Morford gaze at the turntable bridge, 96 by 18½ feet and weighing 70 tons.

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Countywide

OXNARD

Berm Building in Preparation for El Niño

A bulldozer shoveled countless piles of sand on Saturday, fortifying Oxnard's Silver Strand Beach with a six-block-long berm to protect seaside homes against the upcoming high tide season, as well as from waters heightened by El Niño.

The tides are already inching to as close as 2 feet from the concrete patio of Bill Edwards' two-story Ocean Drive beach home. And Channel Islands Harbor officials say the peak of the high-tide season is expected to begin this week and last through mid-December.

"I'm nervous," Edwards said. "We're losing sand pretty consistently now. What's it going to be like when El Niño hits? . . . It's pretty scary."

But he said he "feels much better" knowing the county has started its winter preparation tactics.

Saturday marked the first phase of berm construction: 2-foot-high sand ledges were created from the 1500 to the 2100 block of Ocean Drive. And harbor officials plan to launch a second phase, with longer and larger berms, by Dec. 15 for Silver Strand Beach and possibly Hollywood Beach.

Berms are created by dragging mounds of sand—usually near homes—and pad-



BRYAN CHAN / Los Angeles Times

Berm construction began Saturday on Silver Strand Beach in Oxnard.

every year, Peveler said this is the first time since 1983—the last El Niño—that the county has built berms in this manner.

"We don't move sand every year," he said. "But because of the conditions of the waves, it's critical."

No property was damaged during the storms 14 years ago, though the streets were flooded, Peveler said.

The news that his home has a good chance of being protected reassured Edwards, who spent much of the day watching the bulldozer scoop sand from his backyard to create strong ledge-like blockades.

"I'm glad the county is working on this," he said, adding that he invited county Supervisor John Flynn—who helped kick off the first berm phase—to look at the tides from his balcony earlier

OXNARD

Murder Trial to Begin in Toddler's Death

Opening statements are scheduled to begin this week in the murder trial of Gabriela and Rogelio Hernandez, the Oxnard teens accused of abusing and fatally beating their 2-year-old toddler, Joselyn.

The 18-year-old defendants face charges of murder and felony child abuse for allegedly beating and burning the little girl before her death on June 22, 1996.

The father faces an additional charge of torture.

Joselyn died as a result of blunt force injuries to her abdomen.

the two parents, who were in custody for a time, were charged with the deaths of the child and her mother.

Next week, attorneys on the defense and prosecution sides will present prospective jurors with a list of pretrial motions, including a request by Rogelio Hernandez to sever the joint

Hernandez's planned defense was that his wife was a battered woman who was in the hands of her young

husband, according to the request. The request was denied.

SIMI VALLEY

Council Approves Tapo Street

It probably won't be long before Third Street in Pasadena a run-of-the-mill street could flourish that appeals to the nostalgic.

Think nostalgic: ing palm trees on either side of an attractive median and entrance to Avenue and Freeway that feel.

Those are part of an ongoing project on Third Street, an area that will have earthquake amenities could be a general Community Grant funds for Maintenance and Development.

The Simi Valley Council asked to approve for the improvement meeting. Council asked to approve block grant funding program to the

"This is an important Manager Don P.

"We'll start in spring and hope early summer, far away."

SIMI VALLEY

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COUNTRESS POT

WE MAKE THE WORLD'S BEST MATTRESS

SERTA PERFECT NIGHT

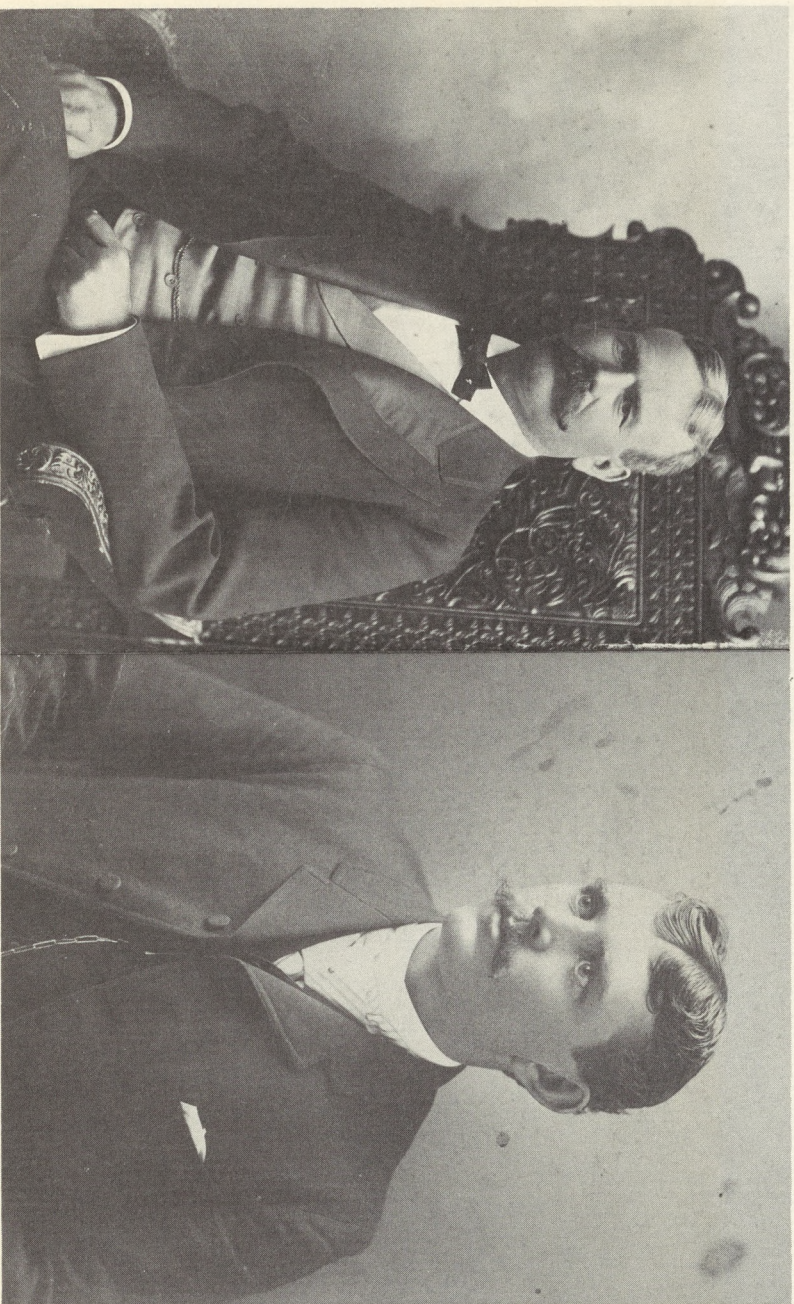
\$100 OFF ANY QUEEN OR KING SET
Except Ad Beds

Terrible Disaster, Miraculous Escape

SOUTHERN PACIFIC TRAIN PLUNGES INTO SURF NEAR RINCON. THREE CROWDED COACHES ROLL OVER AND OVER DOWN THE DECLIVITY — VENTURANS ON TRAIN ESCAPE ALL INJURY.

One of the most terrific and complete and at the same time the most fortunate railroad disasters which ever occurred on the coast took place on the coast line route on Saturday evening at 7:20 o'clock. The accident was to the day train which arrives at Ventura from San Francisco at 8 p.m. It occurred just this side of The Rincon and at a point where the railroad hugs closest [to] the steep mountain which rises from the pounding surf at its feet. Here the road by a series of easy curves hugs the mountainside some fifty feet above the tidewater. On the evening in question the train was running along these curves on time, at a rate of speed which Superintendent Burkhalter places at 30 miles per hour and which passengers on the train estimate at anywhere from 40 to 50 miles, dragging a baggage, smoker, day coach, chair car, diner and parlor car, when of a sudden there was a jar and a bump and a sickening and sudden stop and disaster had come.

The story is told by Assessor Donlon who with Charley Donlon and Owen Boling occupied the smoker. The former two were returning from Santa Ynez while Mr. Boling was on his way home to spend Sunday with his parents. "Charley," said the assessor, "had just remarked that we were hitting the high places and doing a little going ourselves when suddenly a jerk and a bump came and made me grab the seat ahead. Then came a grinding and more bumps and a stop. We got out pretty quick to see what the trouble was. I remembered that Mrs. Newby was aboard in the car behind us because I had been talking to her at the Santa Barbara depot. My first thought was that there had been an accident, and I got out and went back to see if she was all right. I found the back of her car tilting on the edge of the bank and helped her out. I could see nothing of the other cars which ought to have been hitched on. All was dark. Then my eyes grew accustomed to the dark, and I spied the other three cars on the beach below. All was dark there and quiet as the grave. I told Mrs. Newby the rest of the train had rolled



James A. Donlon

Charles Donlon



Helen (Serene) Newby

Brewster

VENTURA, CAL.

down the bank and that all the people were dead as I heard nothing from them. She said, 'Let us go to them.' We scrambled down the bank; but before we reached the cars, the windows in them began to rattle and smash. The passengers inside had begun breaking them after they found the car had come to a stop. We reached the car and began helping out men, women and children — Charlie and I, with the help of the porters and men passengers who by this time were helping themselves. There was little confusion through it all — no screaming nor crying. Everybody acted bravely and coolly, and soon everybody was out of the coaches and those not hurt were aiding those who had been cut and bruised."

Mrs. Newby was in the rear of the day coach when the jar of trouble came. The trucks under her car, or the trucks at her end of the car, left the track and pounded along the rails for some distance before the stop came. It was all so quick that she hardly had time to think before she was being helped out of her coach on the side of the declivity. The car leaned at that end to a degree that was appalling; and she breathed easy only when she got on solid ground. Then came the aiding of those imprisoned in the cars on the beach. In this work the Donlons and Mrs. Newby did heroic work.

It was not a great while before people began gathering at the scene of the wreck from neighboring farm houses. The Ablett family and Dr. Hill and family were on the spot in time to do a great deal of good work before a brakeman could be dispatched to Carpinteria and wire for relief to Santa Barbara and Ventura. The news reached Ventura at 8:20 and spread consternation through the town. Immediately rigs of all kinds were in demand. The wreck was reported a few miles up the beach; and all who could started for the scene. It was known that Mrs. Newby and the Donlons were aboard, and the friends of those parties were wild with suspense.

Dr. Cunnane had been sent for and took the track motor with Wade Argabrite. T. Newby, George Dennis and Sheriff McMartin with several others hugged the edges of a handcar which the railroad dispatched with a section gang. The ride up the road was an anxious one. Some miles had been made when the handcar party were met by an approaching engine and train. This the party flagged and boarded. It proved to be the remnant of the disabled train: an engine, the smoker and baggage car on the way to Ventura. It was filled with passengers, all more or less bruised and shaken. Mrs. Newby was found aboard by her husband, unhurt. At Ventura a half dozen of the passengers got off for a night's rest at the hotel. It turned out that none was seriously hurt, and yesterday they resumed travel to their respective destinations.

There was a happy meeting with the friends of the unscathed Venturans who had so narrow an escape.

Thousands visited the scene of the wreck yesterday from all the surrounding county. The more it was studied, the greater was the wonder that any passengers in the derailed cars escaped alive. While the shells of the cars were generally in fairly good condition, the internal arrangements were simply chaos. A chair car and a heavy diner tumbled over the bank and to the beach below where the high tides surround them, while a parlor car which was in the rear of the train careened on its side and slipped halfway down the declivity where it lays with its trucks to the sky. It caught on the jagged riprap rock at the foot of the grade. It was steeper where the other two cars toppled and they went clear over, apparently turning twice in the descent. They alighted right side up, but the confusion of tumbling seats and detachable stuff within must have been frightful in the wild descent. The gas was all extinguished in the cars in the fall, but a fire was going in the dining car cook stove. It is thought that the car's evolutions were so rapid that no opportunity was offered for the fire to fall from the range. At any rate there was no fire in the wreck, which was a fortunate circumstance.

At the wreck yesterday, Superintendent Burkhalter and Resident Engineer Dehuer of Bakersfield were on hand with gangs of men to clear up the rubbish and get the track in shape. The road bed and ties were badly torn before the engine was stopped; and new ties had to be put in for a considerable distance. It was impossible for Mr. Burkhalter to account for the wreck. He said the drivers of the engine jumped while the front truck and tender held the rails. This jump was on the inside next the mountain. When the jump occurred, the track showed itself to be without a flaw in ties, roadbed or rails. The smoker and baggage car held the rails despite the fact that the engine must have spread them to let off the hind truck of the day coach. This truck jumped the track toward the ocean; and the chair car immediately behind followed with a plunge over the bank, being driven on by the heavy diner behind, which followed as did the parlor car, down the declivity. The derailment of these three cars was sudden and complete, and perhaps was caused by the sudden stop and the buckling of the train. Engineer Dehuer was as much in the dark as were other experts as to why the engine left the rails with only her drivers, or at all; and it will probably always remain a mystery of railroading as to just what did cause the trouble.

The derailed engine was placed upon the track with the assistance of a light engine which was waiting at the time of the accident at the

Punta Gorda switch. A relief train with physicians was soon at the scene from Santa Barbara; and the injured and most of the passengers were taken back to Santa Barbara. It was found that some forty persons were more or less injured; and the railroad company did all possible to relieve and help these and all the passengers, indeed. The track was cleared at 2:30 yesterday, and the numerous trains held up at Punta Gorda and Carpinteria were hurried through. It will be necessary to build 2,500 feet of track on the beach to run the derailed cars from the beach up to Punta Gorda. The damage to the company cannot be determined until it is known how badly these cars are injured.

All in all, the accident was a peculiar one; and no one who visited the spot can help but say it was a lucky one also.

NOTES OF THE WRECK

The news reached Ventura while the gayety and enjoyment at the Flower Festival were greatest. The result was consternation and excitement.

The section car with Foreman Gleason, his gang of Japanese and McMartin, Tom Newby and George Dennis had a narrow escape being run down by the engine of the Limited one mile this side of the wreck. The night was very foggy and the headlight was not seen until the engine was almost upon the handcar. The train was flagged and the three Venturans returned to town upon it.

Morbid curiosity led many to the wreck Sunday. Souvenir collectors were on the scene early. One woman picked up and carefully folded away a blood-soaked handkerchief. Pieces of chinaware from the dining car were gathered and carried off.

How the occupants of the parlor car ever escaped is a mystery. The car is on its side with trucks up the bank, its rear end pointing skyward. It must have been like climbing from a chimney to get out of it. Mr. Mullin says that there was the greatest excitement about the wreck; but the unhurt were harder to quiet and control, and made more fuss than the injured.

The *Examiner* in its usual sensational way printed a fake story of burning cars plunging into the surf and narrow escapes from drowning. As a matter of fact, the gas was extinguished and even the fires in the kitchen of the dining car went out; and at highest [tide] the water just touched the car farthest from the bank.

Miss Blumb, Principal of the Shasta School and sister of Professor Blumb of the Cienga School, was on her way to Ventura to visit Miss Ismert. She was in the chair car and suffered considerable injury. Her

knee was badly wrenched, and she sustained several scalp wounds. Mullin who lives near the scene of the wreck, states that the first he knew of the accident was when the three months' old child of Mrs. Haines was brought to his home for sustenance. He immediately went to the wreck. Mrs. Haines was lying beside the track where she had been carried, unable to move but moaning piteously, "My baby, my baby".

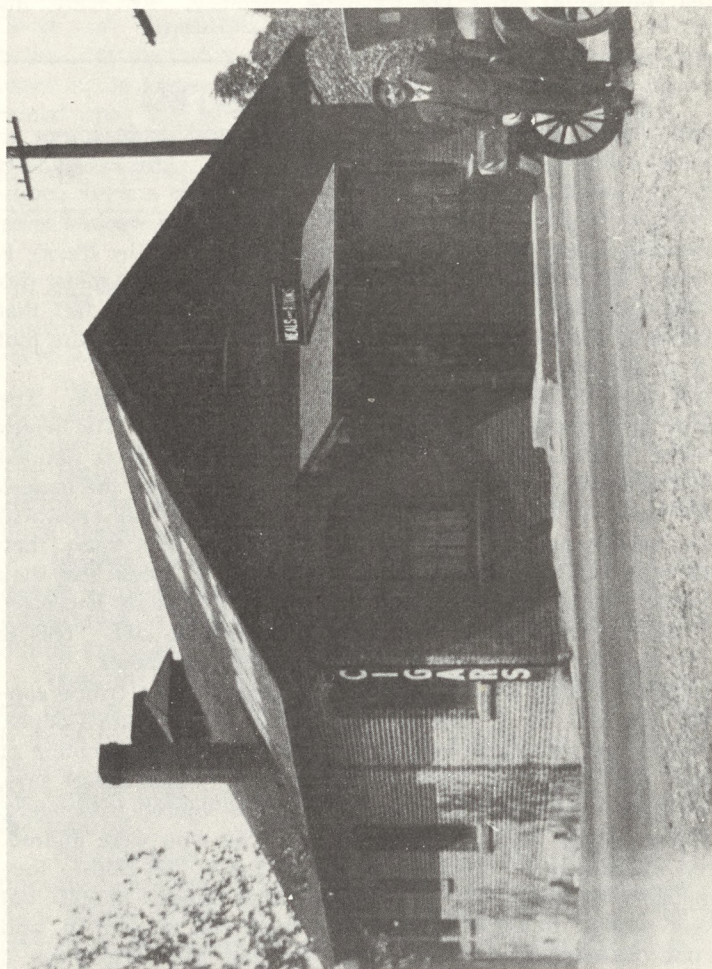
THE WRECK INVESTIGATED

Southern Pacific engineers are investigating and endeavoring to make explanation of the disastrous wreck at The Rincon. One explanation given is that the roadbed at the point of the wreck is in a weak condition. The story is that the foot of the shale bluff has been washed away to a considerable extent by the action of high tides; and the theory is that there was a dip in the rails at the scene of the wreck. Against this statement are the apparent solidity of the roadbed, and the fact that great quantities of sandstone have actually been dumped along the foot of the bluff at the very point where the wreck occurred.

The most plausible theory is that fast time caused the trouble. The big engine at high speed would run lightly on the track. The wreck took place at a reverse curve; and the theory is that the drivers jumped the track with the swing of the engine at this reverse. Then the flanges cut the bolts from the fish plates and the heads from the rail spikes so that, as the tender and next three cars went over the track, they loosened the rails on the outside of the curve to such an extent that they simply fell over and let down the last three cars. One thing is certain; the engine left the rails before the cars toppled off the cliff. This is shown by the fact that the engineer used his emergency brakes.

Of the injured people only four are now considered in a critical condition. They are Mrs. H. C. Smith, Ed. Gogerty, Mrs. Laura Cooper, and Frank Christmas; but these may recover with the single exception of Mrs. Cooper, for whom no hope is entertained. The *Herald* says, "Already attempts are being made to settle with the injured passengers. An agent today offered \$100 to a man and his wife who were injured. They figured for him that \$112 was the actual cost of the clothes they wore and which were destroyed. The agent at once jumped to \$300, but the passenger refused to settle. Over fifty claims will be sent in, and even the one woman in the cars who was not hurt will have a considerable bill. Her watch and pocketbook were lost, her clothing destroyed and her journey delayed."

—*Ventura Free Press*, June 5, 1903



Saugus Cafe

The Last Days of Steam

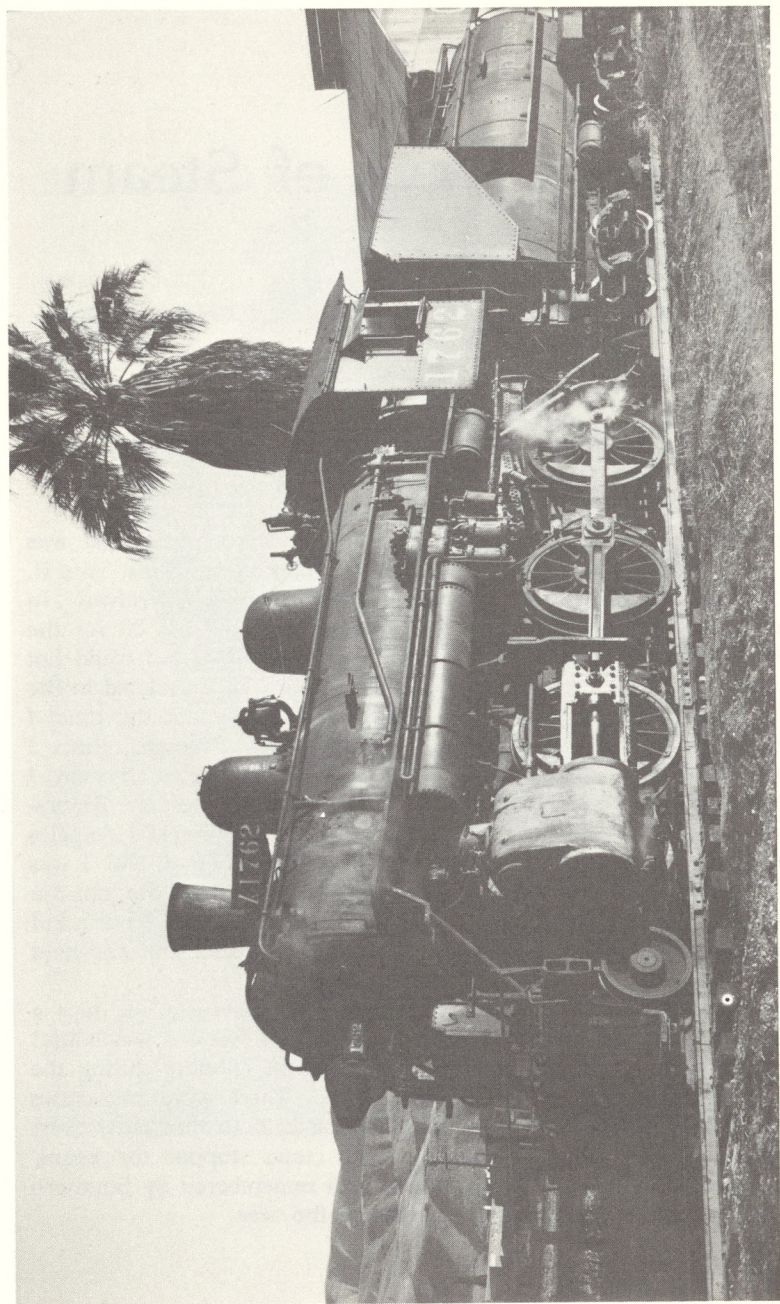
By Robert R. McNeel

I.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE SANTA PAULA BRANCH

There are of course many remembrances of events and how life was during that memorable period in our history known as World War II, depending on the person, the location and the occupation involved. In those days when patriotism ran high and everyone did his bit for the war effort, I had tried to enlist in the Railroad Battalion, but could not pass the physical. Wanting to do something more directly related to the war effort than the Post Office (where I was employed at the time) I went over to Bakersfield to hire out as a locomotive fireman. Since I had worked in this capacity in 1936-37 on the Los Angeles Division, I was immediately hired as an experienced man. I worked off the Bakersfield extra board¹ at Fresno in yard service, and off the Los Angeles extra board for several months. One night in December of 1942 I was called to relieve on the Los Angeles—Fillmore local. Liking the job, the engineer and the rest of the crew, and the country travelled, I put a bid in for a regular assignment to this run, got it a few weeks later and held it for several months.

This particular job went to work late in the afternoon six days a week at Taylor Yards² on San Fernando Road and worked westbound (the outgoing trip) one night, laid over for rest at Fillmore during the day and made the return trip the next night. There were two crews assigned to this run so there was daily service in both directions every night; they met each other at Saugus. Both crews stopped for 'beans' around midnight at the old Saugus Cafe, well remembered by Southern Pacific railroad men, truckers and farmers of the area.



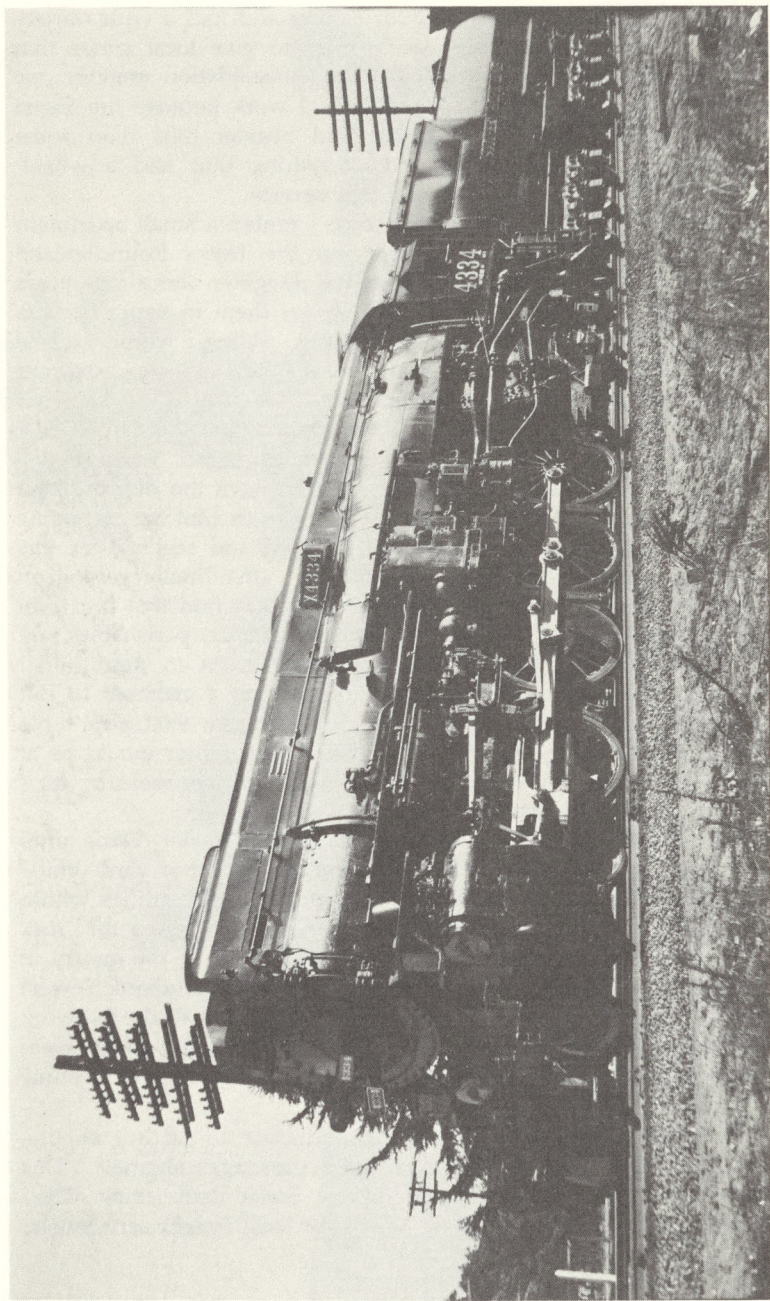
M-6 2-6-0 Fillmore
Usual Mogul for locals

We always had fairly long trains for a local and had a wide variety of engines. While the Southern Pacific tried to give local crews that worked with branch lines either Moguls or Consolidation engines, we often got larger engines not designed for local work because the Santa Paula branch (being the old mainline)³ had heavier rails than some branches. But it was war time; and everything that had a wheel, whether square or round, was pressed into service.

After getting the assignment of this run, I rented a small apartment on Perlita Street just off Fletcher Drive near the Taylor Roundhouse;⁴ and my wife of just a few years and my little daughter about four years of age came to Los Angeles for it was lonely for them in Santa Barbara with me away from home so much of the time. When I would get the call to go to work, my wife might make me a lunch to save restaurant money; and I would head for the roundhouse to register in and get our engine for the night's run. During the war period the Southern Pacific was hard-pressed for power, even leasing some engines from several mid-western and eastern railroads which did not have the demand that the western roads had. Frequently we would have to wait for an engine just arriving from some other run to be serviced and readied for this call. And that was not the end of the delays: after finally getting an engine, we would often come out into the yards and find that our train had not yet been made up! The press of military traffic, perishables and hot merchandise trains forced precedence to be given to that traffic. Finally the yardmaster would get around to ordering a switcher to put together our train, and we might be out of town by 9:00 p.m. No matter what time of evening it was, my wife and daughter would be at the Fletcher Drive crossing to wave goodbye to me as we went by for I would not be back until two days later.

None of the locals did any work after leaving Taylor Yards until they were past Burbank Tower. That territory was within yard limits⁵ and Los Angeles switchers were responsible for industrial sidings within it. Theoretically the Los Angeles—San Fernando local, called the 'rock job' by the men because much of their time was spent in the quarry at Roscoe, was to do the switching of spurs, etc., between Burbank Tower⁶ and San Fernando; the Los Angeles—Mojave locals were to do the work on the mainline from San Fernando on; and the Fillmore locals were only to work the branch line. But due to the extreme press of wartime business it did not always work out that way.

I recall one night we got to Taylor Roundhouse to get our engine, and lo and behold it was a 4300 class 4-8-2 passenger engine!⁷ This class was about the largest permitted on the Santa Paula line. They were beautiful engines, but not at all suited for local freight service; she

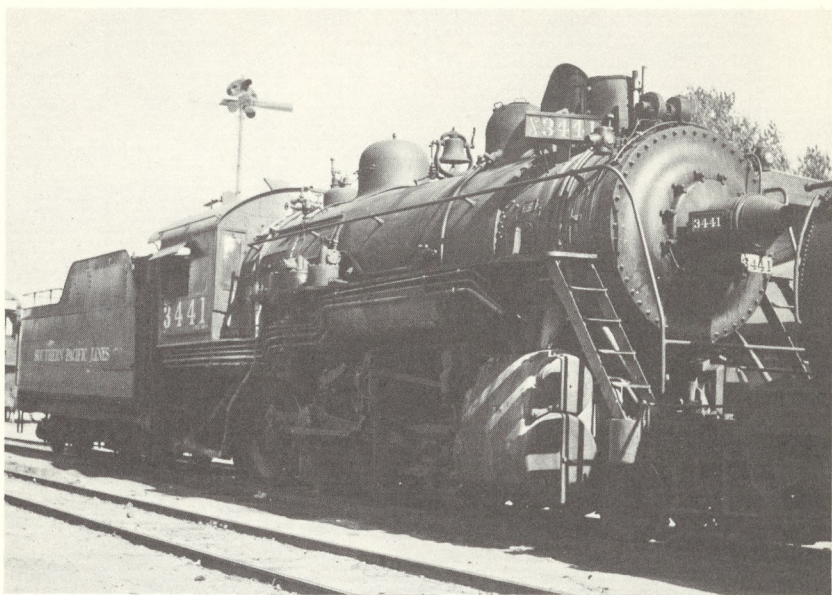


MT-3 4-8-2 Elayon
High-speed passenger engine



Engineer Ernest Gunsolley

was resplendent in fresh paint and right out of the shops with her rods shined clean with steel wool, and her brass numbers on the cab and letters on the tank were glistening. She was the 4334, one of a relatively few passenger engines that had the class of brass numbers and letters, and had been assigned to the Golden State passenger run. Having been through the shops for a complete overhaul meant she had new bearings throughout and needed to be operated at slow speeds for several hundred miles until they were broken in and did not run hot. She had been assigned to our run for her first trip after shopping and was limited to 25 mph. Inasmuch as the 4300 class were large, heavy and had a long rigid wheel base, we anticipated possible trouble on some of the lighter rail spurs that we might have to use. Sure enough, on that night the rock job needed some help at the quarry with some westbound traffic; we were told by the dispatcher to go into the quarry and get some cars to add to our train. Because the track in much of the quarry was light and had tight curves, our 4300 broke a rail at one point on a curve as we were pulling out some cars. With my engineer, Ernest Gunsolley, anticipating something of the sort, he was moving very slowly; and we got only one driver on the ground before he could stop the big engine. After much hard work in such cramped quarters under



C-26 2—8—0 Saugus
Consolidation used as a helper

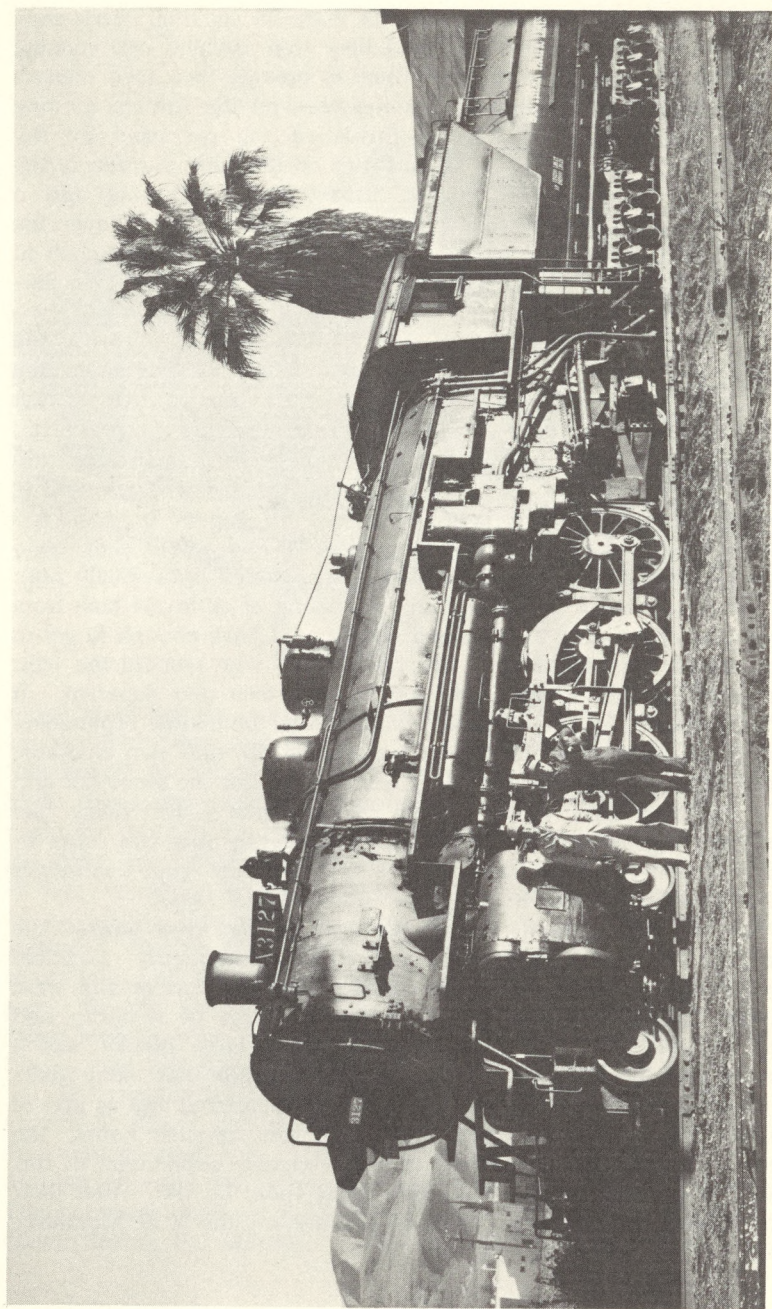
those huge drivers, we got a re-railing 'frog'⁸ spiked to the ties under the derailed driver and managed by skillful operation on the part of our 'Hoghead'⁹ to get her back on the rail without any further damage. Since this action took several hours, we did not get to Saugus by midnight for our lunch. In fact it was almost noon the next day when we got there: the initial delay at the quarry meant that we had added stops at San Fernando, Tunnel, Elayon and Newhall for the 'morning parade' as we called the passenger runs #56, #26 and #60, plus all their sections. We finally arrived at Fillmore about 5:00 p.m. almost nine hours late, had our evening sleep and left for our return trip about 4:00 a.m. By the time we were back in Los Angeles, our turn had been called with an extra crew; and we got a 'dead day' out of it until the following one when we could assume our regular run on time.

The regular engineer on this job was a Mr. A. Swift, but he was known as 'Buck' and that was all I ever heard him called. He was a fine man to work with, a gentleman and he had been on that job for a number of years and knew the intricacies of the run in minute detail. The company had set up two boxcars at Fillmore for the use of the crews during the layovers. They had put in beds, installed running

water with a sink and piped in gas and a stove for cooking. Each crew had one of the cars as their own; and they were divided into cooking and sleeping areas. It was up to the men to provide their own utensils and bed clothes. Engineer Swift, having been on the run for so long and planning to stay on it, had furnished the car used by the enginemen. It was very nice as he had rugs on the floor, curtains at the windows, a fine supply of kitchen utensils and tableware and a refrigerator; also he had done extra electric wiring for lamps over the beds to read by, and had put in a davenport and an overstuffed chair in the living room area: it was really a home away from home. We firemen chipped in for the food and laundry bill.

As for food, I will never forget my first trip on this run. I was the only new man for Buck, the conductor and head and rear brakemen were 'Old Heads'¹⁰ on the job. It was after midnight when we left Saugus, the run down the branch was leisurely though busy as we did much switching at practically every spur and the night was crisp and clear but dark. Being my first trip on the branch, I did not know exactly where I was at all times, but I did notice that we stopped several times right out on the mainline but did no switching and would start again after a little while. This we repeated several times until finally after quite a bit of switching at Fillmore and my taking of oil in the tank from the spur east of town so the westend crew would have enough to get to Oxnard, finally we did tie up. The other crew, who worked the west end from Fillmore to Oxnard and return, took over and departed. It was then I discovered what the extra stops out in the middle of nowhere had been all about: the head brakeman came up with two chickens, corn and other vegetables, some fruit, etc. 'Buck' got the stove hot and what a feed we had. The farmers of the Santa Clara Valley had unknowingly contributed to our repast. Apparently this was more or less of a regular thing on these runs as the train crew kept themselves posted on the best places to make the 'unscheduled' stops.

While we were sleeping during the day, the day crew worked the west end of the branch from Fillmore to Oxnard and return. Engineer George Terreau and Fireman Harry Blanks lived in Fillmore and were established fixtures on this job. Terreau had lots of seniority and worked out of Fillmore for many years; and Harry Blanks was a permanently assigned fireman on the run. It seems that many years before Harry had been hurt in a wreck on The Tehachapi; and as part of the injury settlement requiring light duty and regular hours, the company had agreed to a permanent non-bumpable assignment to this daytime run which was something that Harry could handle. After their run to Oxnard, they turned the engine about on the Y at Montalvo,



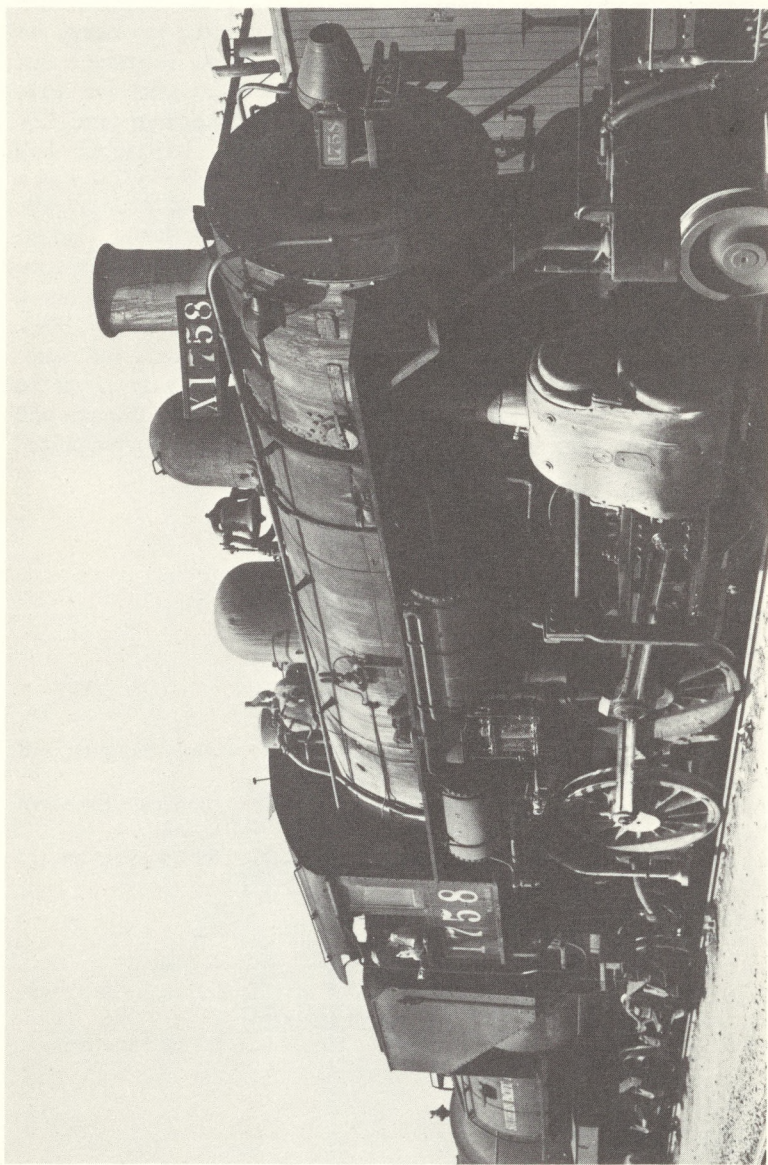
P-12 4-6-2 Fillmore
Harry Blanks, fireman; Buck Swift, engineer

heading in the right direction for them as well as us. They usually got back to Fillmore about 4:00 p.m. and Harry or the head brakeman would act as engine watchman until we were called at 8:00 p.m. for our return trip to Los Angeles. Once in a while the work would be too heavy for them or they would be delayed at Oxnard due to all the wartime traffic for Port Hueneme; and they would not get back until after we were called. This would in turn delay our departure, at one time until 1:00 a.m. but was not often enough to pose major problems: branch line service was not as demanding as on the mainline, even though it was a wartime period. All these factors were what made this run so enjoyable, which of course was the reason after a few months that I (being a junior man with not much seniority) was bumped off the job by a senior man.

How things have changed in the intervening years! The Fillmore depot no longer exists as such; and our bunk cars, located about a block west of the depot are long gone. The trucks have taken over the major portion of the branch line traffic. Bridges are out and may never be rebuilt, depots are to be razed and the east end of the branch will probably be abandoned with the consequent loss of personalized service.

FOOTNOTES

1. List of available substitutes.
2. Railroad yards for assembling trains had a 'hump' between incoming and outgoing cars.
3. From 1887 until 1904 when the Chatsworth Tunnel was completed the Santa Clara Valley was the only route between the coast and inland.
4. Circular building around a turntable for the repair of locomotives, and of 'stalls' where they were readied by the hostler.
5. Area assigned for switching.
6. Control tower was set up high to supervise traffic.
7. Mountain had four leading wheels, eight drivers and two trailing.
8. Nailed to the ties, the derailed wheels could be guided back on the track.
9. Or hogger, is the engineer.
10. Fireman is the tallow pot, conductor is the 'brains or ORC, and the brakeye.



M-6 2-6-0 Ventura
Freight service for light rails

II.

MEMORIES OF THE OJAI BRANCH

I have fond memories of the days of steam on the Southern Pacific Railroad as a locomotive fireman, particularly during the hectic days of World War II and specifically on the short but very interesting branch line from Ventura along the river to the town of Ojai. Having been born in Santa Barbara and remembering my parents and grandparents tell of going every summer near Nordhoff in The Ojai to work in the apricots, I was especially interested in the country. I was able to bid and be assigned to the Oxnard—Ojai local during the summer of 1942.

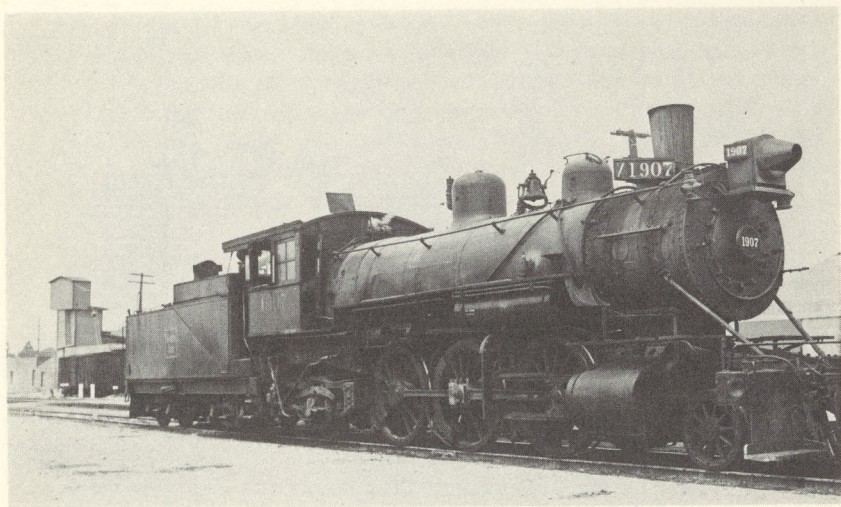
In those days the Ojai job went to work in Oxnard each morning except Sunday at 10:00 a.m. During the war Oxnard was a very busy place: with all these locals turning¹¹ at that point (a Fillmore Turn, Los Angeles—Oxnard Turn and the Santa Barbara—Oxnard Turn) plus the beet trains via the Santa Paula branch; the mainline from Los Angeles and southern points and the mainline from the north, plus three switchers around the clock; and the many military movements to Port Hueneme via the Ventura County Railway connection. On going to work (we usually had an M-6 class Mogul (2-6-0) engine)¹² we first would check oil, water, engine supplies, etc., do some local switching (making up our own train as the day switcher was busy with other chores, cutting Oxnard stuff out of through trains, switching military over to the Ventura County line and dodging mainline military passenger trains) take a final tank of water and then try to get orders from the dispatcher to give us the mainline over to Ventura. He would manage to sandwich us in between the many troop trains and through freights just long enough to clear us. We would not have to do any switching at Ventura as that chore was left to the Santa Barbara—Oxnard local; but sometimes a shipper could not wait until it could get at it, and would pull or deliver a car to a Ventura industry.

Our engine was always given to us at Oxnard with it headed east, which meant that on the outward trip (west on the mainline and up the branch to Ojai) we were operating tender¹³ first. This was done by strict company rule for a very good reason (although it was not too handy for the engine crew): the branch had a very steep portion of the line just past Casitas Springs. This stiff grade to Oak View had several sharp curves and a very large, steep and crooked fill over which the Southern

Pacific Railroad Company only allowed an engine to be operated down the hill in a stack forward position: most freight engines of the smaller classes had no trailing truck,¹⁴ so the downhill operation had the front end forward and the pony truck would help guide the engine around the curves.

After we left Ventura on the outboard leg of the trip each day, we would have empties for some spur in the oilfields near The Avenue. We would save up the loads from this area to be picked up on our return trip. The most pleasant portion of the trip was around the flats near Casitas Springs: under the overhanging branches of giant trees (mostly sycamores) through the fields and along the brush and tree sections of the river bank. It was such a lush growth that the train actually went through tunnel-like sections, completely surrounded by trees and hanging vines. Next we had all the engine could do to climb the hill into Oak View where we might have a switching task to perform. Often we had to double the hill for a 1700¹⁵ could only haul about seven cars up that steep grade. We never got up much speed as the branch had few if any fenced areas, cattle were frequently on the track and children were always playing at many spots near them. We frequently had much whistling to do.

Upon final arrival in Ojai we first did all the switching chores, pulling out the empties and putting in the loads to several industrial spurs. Now we would tie the train down: I would fill the boiler fairly full and get a full head of steam on the engine, then kill the fire and block the wheels. We (the engineer, conductor, two brakemen, and myself) would walk over to town about two blocks and hit a restaurant for 'beans'. We were in no great hurry (in fact nothing was in much of a hurry on branch line operations) so in about an hour or so we would go back to the small Ojai yards; I would put a fire in the engine (this being done by a bit of kerosene-soaked lighted waste) and soon I would have the boiler pressure back up on the mark. As it would be getting on towards sunset by this time, we would then make the last switch of the evening, which was always the citrus packing house. While we were picking up the loads and making up the train for the return trip, the rear brakeman would go into the packing house, 'chew the rag' with the evening watchman and always come back with a box of oranges (culls, but sweet and full of juice) some of which he would give to us on the engine but the majority of that box of oranges would be rolled off to the children at a certain house on the outskirts of Oak View just after we crossed Highway 150. As we neared the house old man McMackin, my engineer who had been on this job for many years, would blow the whistle a number of times to let the family know we were coming so



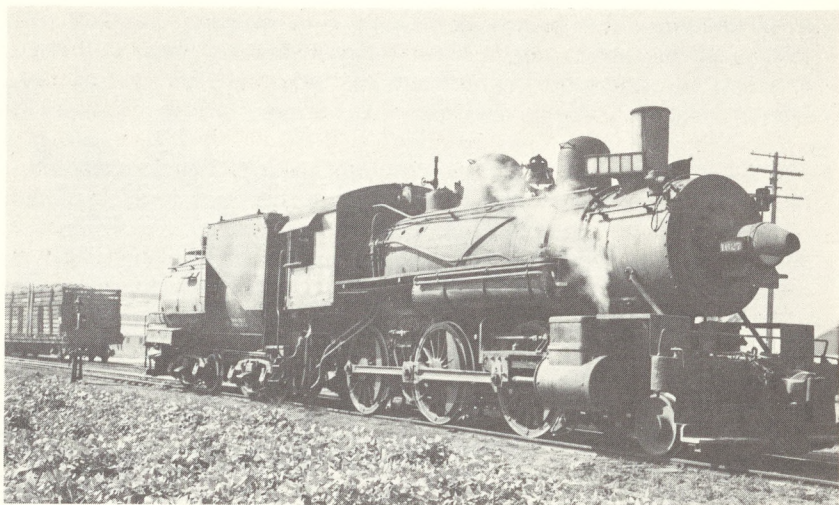
CB&R 2—6—2 Ventura
On lease from the Midwest

everybody would be out to get the oranges. Mac slowed down the train, and the rear shack¹⁶ threw them off in the green grass that bordered the track at that point. I noticed a beautiful 'teen age girl was a member of that family, and she watched the proceedings as her younger brothers and sisters gathered up the oranges each evening. The rear brakeman up and married the gal a couple of years later, and I understand they lived happily ever after.

We would then proceed (the engine headed in the right direction) carefully down the hill with the train under control, through the Casitas Springs area, pick up our loads of oil and then stop at Ventura junction for the conductor to get the operator at Ventura to obtain permission from the dispatcher for us to come down the mainline to the Ventura station. If there was nothing coming on the mainline, we could do this on verbal instructions as it was within Ventura yard limits. We then would be given train orders to get us to Oxnard, depending on how much traffic the dispatcher had on the road. In general we had clear sailing and would run into Oxnard as fast as the old Mogul could turn a wheel.

We were released on arrival at Oxnard, which was anywhere from 7 to 10 p.m. depending on the amount of business for the day on our run.

We did not have any switching to do at the end of the run since either the afternoon or midnight Oxnard switcher would break up our small



M-4a 2—6—0 Oxnard
Working the sugar beets

train for inclusion in mainline moves during the night. Once however the dispatcher had a job to do after arrival at Oxnard, and this happened only one night after I had been assigned to a switcher job in Santa Barbara. This memorable night was that of September 25, 1942. McMakin with Fireman Bellamy (his first trip as a young fireman relieving me) got an order from the dispatcher to back out the mainline to Montalvo, take the Santa Paula branch and assist the 3466 (a consolidation 2-8-0 engine)¹⁷ into Oxnard with a long beet train that had come from Bakersfield and was routed via the branch to the sugar beet factory; but 3466 was having engine problems (I believe it had leaking flues) and had no steam so it could not keep air enough to operate the train. As I understand it, Mac hooked onto the beet train ahead of the 3466 somewhere out past Saticoy. Everything went well until they neared Montalvo. Engineer McMakin reduced the train line but nothing much happened as he attempted to slow the train for the junction. He 'big-holed'¹⁸ her but she still kept coming. Either an angle cock had been turned by some prankish kid while the train had been stalled, or something blocked the line between the two engines; the train was now running wild at a good clip with no brakes and headed for the derail at the west leg of the Montalvo-Y where it joined the mainline westbound; and there was nothing Mac could do about it. As the engines went by the packing shed near Highway 101, Fireman Bellamy jumped and landed

up against one of the loading docks with a good many bruises and a broken hand, but alive. Engineer McMakin, good company man that he was, rode it out (the other engine crew had unloaded somewhat earlier). About 10 loaded cars of sugar beets plus the two engines piled up all over the derail, siding and mainline. After the dust had partially settled, here came McMakin crawling out of his overturned engine with the tank practically atop the boiler, throwing the beets aside that had completely filled the cab. You will never guess what he had with him: yes, his lunch bucket! It is indeed surprising what a human being will do under exciting circumstances.

Fireman Bellamy told me later he almost decided to quit the job if that was the way they ran a railroad; but his better judgment prevailed, he stuck on the job after recuperating from the experience and became a fine locomotive engineer on the San Joaquin Division of the Southern Pacific Railroad. As for myself, I worked for many years in the Santa Barbara yards where I preferred to stay near my home. Railroading in the days of steam was much more interesting, exciting, even rewarding (though much dirtier) than the almost plush surroundings of modern diesel power of today.

FOOTNOTES

11. Originating.
12. Moguls had two leading, six driving and no trailing wheels.
13. Car carrying fuel and water.
14. Wheels under the cab to support the fuelbox.
15. Number series of less powerful engines.
16. Brakeman.
17. Consolidation had two leading wheels, eight drivers and no trailing wheels.
18. He put on the brakes, and threw her into reverse.

